January 31, 2001

NOTICE OF PROPOSED ACTION
AND PREPARATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
for
NORTHWEST 2000 PLAN
(ALBUQUERQUE Air Route Traffic Control Center (ARTCC) – PHOENIX Terminal Radar Approach Control (TRACON))

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) is in the final phase of evaluating an airspace integration project to support the efforts of Albuquerque Air Route Traffic Control Center (ARTCC) and Phoenix Terminal Radar Approach Control (TRACON). The proposed project will modify as necessary, route and sector structures and air traffic control procedures within the confines of the respective facilities' airspace. The intent of the project is to redesign terminal, sector, and enroute geometries, and to develop a unified, procedurally consistent, air traffic control operational environment. The project will maximize benefits of satellite navigation systems. The proposed changes will decrease the need for aircraft to be placed in holding patterns due to the more efficient approach and departure procedures. This will result in decreased delays, thus easing and balancing air traffic controller workload. The proposed route changes can be expected to enhance safety margins, a positive flight safety implication.

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) is required to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1970, which calls on federal agencies to consider environmental issues as part of their decision making process. The FAA Western Pacific Region is funding these efforts on behalf of the FAA, and has retained Landrum & Brown as the FAA's environmental contractor. In accordance with FAA Order 1050.1D, the contractor will prepare an Environmental Assessment (EA). As part of the EA process, the FAA is requesting your comments on the proposed project (see attached Proposed Project Description) prior to the completion and circulation of a Draft EA. After release of the Draft EA, public informational meetings will be conducted during the Draft EA comment period. The Notice of Availability for review and comment on the Draft EA, and for the public informational meetings, will also be provided upon release of the Draft EA

Please submit any response you may have within 30 days from the date of this notice, or no later than March 5, 2001. Your response, and any questions or comments, should be directed to:

Landrum & Brown Inc.
6151 W. Century Blvd., Suite 1000
Los Angeles, CA 90045
Attention: Mr. Harvey (Bud) Riebel

Background

The proposed action will change the airspace and procedures within Albuquerque ARTCC's Northwest Specialty, airspace abutting Phoenix TRACON. Albuquerque ARTCC's Northwest Specialty controls enroute aircraft arriving and departing Phoenix Sky Harbor International to and from the north. To accommodate these enroute airspace changes, approach and departure procedures for Phoenix Sky Harbor, controlled by Phoenix TRACON will be altered.

An ARTCC area is divided into geographical and vertical blocks of airspace called "sectors". Low altitude sector's control aircraft from the surface to approximately 23,000 feet above mean sea level (MSL). High altitude sectors control aircraft above approximately 23,000 feet MSL. Albuquerque Center's Northwest Specialty refers to a geographical group of sectors within the Center airspace control area.

Approach and Departure procedures within a Terminal area are referred to as Standard Instrument Arrival Route's (STAR's) and Departure Procedures (DP's). STAR's are designed to facilitate transition between enroute and terminal airspace. The procedure ends when it joins the instrument approach for the destination airport. At many busy controlled airports, specific DP's are published to facilitate transition between takeoff and enroute operations. The DP provides a standard route from the terminal to the enroute structure.

Albuquerque Center

The Northwest 2000 Plan proposes to address the increasing activity at Phoenix Sky Harbor. Current procedures result in inefficient miles-in-trail restrictions and resultant arrival and departure delays to the Phoenix Terminal area. Modification of the procedures and structure of the Albuquerque ARTCC Northwest Specialty sectors will provide enhanced airspace efficiency, reduce controller workload and maintain the current level of safety.

Sector 45 currently only controls approximately 5 percent of all the Northwest Specialty traffic. To better balance workload under the Northwest 2000 plan, a new procedure - the GUTSY DP is introduced in Sector 45. The GUTSY DP will off-load all traffic from the current EAGUL DP in Sector 38 and a portion of traffic from the DRAKE DP in Sector 43. This will eliminate head-on departures and arrivals to and from the north, reduce complexity, increase safety and efficiency, and result in more equitable sector workload.

Sector 43 will retain one STAR and one DP (the KARLO STAR and DRAKE DP); however their routes will be reversed from the current procedures. These procedures will be re-named the MAYHEM STAR and CHILY DP. This will allow departures to climb without crossing the arrival stream. Sector 38 will control two, rather than three DPs. The two DPs it retains – the ST JOHN DP and DRYHEAT DP – will remain unchanged from the current procedures. Sector 39 will continue to control arrivals from the northeast. However, these STAR's will be slightly altered and re-named JESSE STAR and DBACK STAR.

Phoenix TRACON

Arrival and Departure procedures for Phoenix Sky Harbor and surrounding airports will be modified to accommodate the Albuquerque Center route changes.

Aircraft currently arriving from the northwest are routed via the KARLO STAR. Departures departing northwest are routed via the DRAKE DP. These routes cross approximately 9 miles north of Sky Harbor Airport, thus restricting departing aircraft to lower altitudes until clear of arriving traffic. Phoenix TRACON proposes to reverse these procedures re-naming them the CHILI DP and MAYHEM STAR. This will allow departures to climb to altitude more quickly and accommodate Albuquerque Center's changes to Sector 43.

Aircraft arriving from the northeast are currently routed via the existing FERER and FOSSL STAR's. These STAR's will be modified and aligned with the higher altitude route changes taking place in Albuquerque Center's Sector 39. Once modified these routes will be known as the JESSE and DBACK STAR's.

Aircraft departing to the east are routed via the existing EAGUL, ST.JOHN, or DRYHEAT DP's. The ST.JOHN and DRYHEAT procedures will remain unchanged. The EAGUL departure, used primarily by turbo-prop aircraft will be modified to lessen conflicts with the turbo-jet routes. The new procedure will be identified as the GUTSY DP, and re-routed under the control of Sector 45.

Phoenix TRACON is also proposing an alternative that would change procedures in both the northern (as described above) and southern portions of its terminal airspace. This proposal is described, documented, and analyzed as a separate alternative because it is independent of the changes occurring in Albuquerque Center's northwest specialty airspace. These changes to the south however, compliment the changes to the north terminal area by increasing airspace efficiency, reducing pilot and controller workload, reducing delays and providing higher levels of safety.

The ARLIN STAR, currently used for turbo-jet arrivals from the west and SUNSS STAR which is used by turbo-jets arriving from the southeast will be modified into the YOTES STAR serving aircraft from both southeast and west directions. This will enable a smoother unrestricted climb for aircraft departing to the south. The new procedure will have aircraft arriving from the west follow a similar flight path to that of the ARLIN

STAR, but approximately 5 miles south further south than the present ARLIN STAR route.

Aircraft arriving from the southeast on the YOTES STAR will follow the same flight path to that of the SUNSS STAR when landing to the west. Landings to the east from the new YOTES STAR will be routed further south of the Sky Harbor airport than the existing SUNSS STAR.

Aircraft using satellite airports in the Phoenix Terminal area (Deer Valley, Scottsdale, Glendale, Flacon Field, Goodyear, Williams Gateway, and Chandler) will be transitioned from the primary arrival routes to their respective airports with radar vectors. Satellite departures will be radar vectored to join the primary departure route. Radar vectors are headings issued to an aircraft to provide navigational guidance by radar. Any impacts to these satellite procedures will be fully explained in the Draft EA.

Attached figures 1 through 4 show approximate existing and proposed flight paths of aircraft arriving or departing Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport. Depicted flight paths do not represent actual runway use. Approximate flight altitudes do not represent actual aircraft altitudes. These flight paths and approximate altitudes are based on existing and proposed instrument approach and departure procedures charts. Actual flight tracks and altitudes may vary depending on air traffic control circumstances, runway configuration, prevailing winds, distance from navigational aid, pilot capability, and course interception point. The EA being prepared for these modifications will include data and specific analysis that will describe flight paths and altitudes in greater detail.